Numb. CCXLIX.

The SPECTATOR.

Γέλως ἀναιρεῖ ἐν βροτοῖς δεινὸν κακόν. Frag. Vet. Po.

Saturday, December 15. 1711.

WHEN I make Choice of a Subject that has not been treated of by others, I throw together my Reflections on it without any Order or Method, ſo that may appear rather in the Looſeneſs and of an Eſſay, than in the Regularity of a Diſcourſe. It is after this manner that I ſhall Laughter and Ridicule in my preſent Paper. is the merrieſt Species of the Creation, all and below him are Serious. He ſees things different Light from other Beings, and finds riſing from Objects that perhaps cauſe like Pity or Diſpleaſure in higher Na- Laughter is indeed a very good Counter- the Spleen; and it ſeems but reaſonable ſhould be capable of receiving Joy from no real Good to us, ſince we can receive on what is no real Evil.

in my Forty ſeventh Paper raiſed a Specu- on the Notion of a Modern Philoſopher, ſcribes the firſt Motive of Laughter to be a Compariſon which we make between our and the Perſons we laugh at; or, in other that Satisfaction which we receive from the of ſome Pre-eminence in our ſelves, when the Abſurdities of another, or when we re- any paſt Abſurdities of our own. This hold in moſt caſes, and we may obſerve rarieſt part of Mankind are the moſt ad- to this Paſſion.

read a Sermon of a Conventual in the *Rome*, on thoſe Words of the Wiſe Man, *Laughter it is mad, and of Mirth what does* Upon which he laid it down as a Point of Do- that Laughter was the effect of Original Sin, *Adam* could not laugh before the Fall.

, while it laſts, ſlackens and unbraces the weakens the Faculties, and cauſes a kind of and Diſſolution in all the Powers of the And thus far it may be looked upon as a in the Compoſition of Human Nature. we conſider the frequent Reliefs that we rom it, and how often it breaks the Gloom is apt to depreſs the Mind, and damp our with tranſient unexpected gleams of Joy, one takecare not to grow too Wiſe for ſo great of Life.

The Talent of turning Men into Ridicule, and expoſing to Laughter thoſe one Converſes with, is the Qualification of little ungenerous Tempers. A young Man with this caſt of Mind cuts himſelf off from all manner of Improvement. Every one has his Flaws and Weakneſſes; nay, the greateſt Blemiſhes are often found in the moſt ſhining Characters; but what an abſurd thing is it to paſs over all the valuable Parts of a Man, and fix our Attention on his Infirmities; to obſerve his Imperfections more than his Virtues; and to make uſe of him for the Sport of others, rather than for our own Improvement.

We therefore very often find that Perſons the moſt accompliſhed in Ridicule are thoſe who are very ſhrewd at hitting a Blot, without exerting any thing Maſterly in themſelves. As there are many eminent Criticks who never writ a good Line, there are many admirable Buffoons that animadvert upon every ſingle Defect in another, without ever diſcovering the leaſt Beauty of their own. By this means theſe unlucky little Wits often gain Reputation in the Eſteem of Vulgar Minds, and raiſe themſelves above Perſons of much more laudable Characters.

If the Talent of Ridicule were employed to laugh Men out of Vice and Folly, it might be of ſome uſe to the World; but inſtead of this, we find that it is generally made uſe of to laugh Men out of Virtue and good Senſe, by attacking every thing that is Solemn and Serious, Decent and Praiſe-worthy in Human Life.

We may obſerve, that in the Firſt Ages of the World, when the great Souls and Maſter-pieces of Human Nature were produced, Men ſhined by a noble Simplicity of Behaviour, and were Strangers to thoſe little Embelliſhments which are ſo faſhionable in our preſent Converſation. And it is very remarkable, that notwithſtanding we fall ſhort at preſent of the Ancients in Poetry, Painting, Oratory, Hiſtory, Architecture, and all the noble Arts and Sciences which depend more upon Genius than Experience, we exceed them as much in Doggerel, Humour, Burleſque, and all the trivial Arts of Ridicule. We meet with more Raillery among the Moderns, but more Good Senſe among the Ancients.

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The two great Branches of Ridicule in Writing are Comedy and Burleſque. The firſt ridicules Perſons by drawing them in their proper Characters, the other by drawing them quite unlike themſelves. Burleſque is therefore of two kinds, the firſt repreſents mean Perſons in the Accoutrements of Heroes, the other deſcribes great Perſons acting and ſpeaking, like the baſeſt among the People. *Don Quixote* is an Inſtance of the firſt, and *Lucian*'s Gods of the ſecond. It is a Diſpute among the Criticks, whether Burleſque Poetry runs beſt in Heroic Verſe, like that of the Diſpenſary, or in Doggerel, like that of *Hudibras*. I think where the low Character is to be raiſed the Heroic is the proper Meaſure, but when an Hero is to be pulled down and degraded, it is done beſt in Doggerel.

If *Hudibras* had been ſet out with as much Wit and Humour in Heroic Verſe as he is in Doggerel, he would have made a much more agreeable Figure than he does; though the generality of his Readers are ſo wonderfully pleaſed with the double Rhimes, that I do not expect many will be of my Opinion in this Particular.

I ſhall conclude this Eſſay upon Laughter with obſerving, that the Metaphor of Laughing, applied to Fields and Meadows when they are in Flower, or to Trees when they are in Bloſſom, runs through all Languages; which I have not obſerved of any other Metaphor, excepting that of Fire, and burning, when they are applied to Love. This ſhews that we naturally regard Laughter, as what is in it ſelf both amiable and beautiful. For this Reaſon likewiſe *Venus* has gained the Title of the Laughter-loving Dame, as *Waller* has Tranſlated it, and is repreſented by *Horace* as the Goddeſs who delights in Laughter. *Milton*, in a Joyous Aſſembly of imaginary Perſons, has given us a very poetical Figure of Laughter. His whole Band of Mirth is ſo finely deſcribed that I ſhall ſet it down at length.

But come thou Goddeſs fair and free,
In Heav'n ycleap'd Euphroſyne,
And by Men, heart-eaſing Mirth,
Whom lovely Venus *at a birth*
With two Siſter Graces more
To Ivy-crowned Bacchus *bore*:
Haſte thee Nymph, and bring with thee
Jeſt and youthful Jollity,
Quips and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,
Nods, and Becks, and Wreathed Smiles,
Such as hang on Hebe's *Cheek,*
And love to live in dimple ſleek;
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his ſides.
Come, and trip it as you go
On the light fantaſtick Toe,
And in thy right hand lead with thee,
The Mountain Nymph, ſweet Liberty;
And if I give thee Honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy Crue
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreproved Pleaſures free.

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